

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 02960 01 OF 02 301602Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 2960

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV PINR VE
SUBJ: DIEGO ARRIA'S POTENTIAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY--AN ASSESSMENT

REFS: (A) CARACAS 2674 (B) CARACAS 2574 (C) CARACAS 2646
(D) 77 CARACAS 10540 (E) CARACAS A-94
(F) 77 CARACAS 6384 (G) 77 CARACAS 6164

SUMMARY: DIEGO ARRIA WILL LAUNCH HIS OWN INDEPENDENT
PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SOON. ARRIA, THE GLAMOUR BOY OF
THE PEREZ ADMINISTRATION, BELIEVES THAT VENEZUELA'S DIS-
AFFECTED MIDDLE CLASS AND YOUNGER VOTERS WILL BE HIGHLY
SUSCEPTIBLE TO A MEDIA BLITZ OF WHICH HE IS AN ACKNOWLEDGED
MASTER. EVEN IF HE FAILS TO GAIN THE PRESIDENCY, ARRIA
BELIEVES HE CAN SPLIT POWER THREE WAYS, AND WITH A GROUP
OF SUPPORTERS IN THE CONGRESS, SERVE AS A POWER BROKER.
ALTHOUGH SOME INDEPENDENTS HAVE DONE RELATIVELY WELL
HISTORICALLY, PARTICULARLY IN CARACAS, VENEZUELA'S HISTORY
POINTS TO POLITICAL POWER REMAINING WITH THE TWO MAJOR
PARTIES. NEVERTHELESS, FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF RENNY
OTTOLINA, ARRIA HAS THE INDEPENDENT FIELD TO HIMSELF.
FURTHER, ARRIA HAS CHARISMA WHICH BOTH CANDIDATES FOR
THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES LACK. THESE FACTORS PLUS ARRIA'S
LIVELY, GIMMICKY CAMPAIGN APPROACH COMBINE TO MAKE HIM A
SERIOUS OPPONENT. THUS, THE ARRIA CANDIDACY DRAMATICALLY
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PAGE 02 CARACA 02960 01 OF 02 301602Z

AND SUDDENLY CHANGES THE 1978 CAMPAIGN. WHETHER ARRIA
WILL CHANGE VENEZUELAN POLITICS, OR COMMIT POLITICAL
SUICIDE IS THE KEY QUESTION HIS POTENTIAL CANDIDACY
RAISES. END SUMMARY.

1. INTRODUCTION
FORMERLY INFORMATION MINISTER, CARACAS (FEDERAL DISTRICT)

GOVERNOR, AND PRESIDENT PEREZ' 1973 CAMPAIGN
MANAGER, DIEGO ARRIA IS TODAY THE MOST POPULAR YOUNG
VENEZUELAN POLITICIAN. A DIRECTOR OF TOURISM DURING THE
CALDERA PRESIDENCY, THE BRIGHT, AGGRESSIVE AND KNOWLEDGEABLE
ARRIA HAS NEVER BELONGER TO EITHER MAJOR PARTY. HE
FLIRTED WITH COPEI AND THEN THREW THAT PARTY OVER TO
SUPPORT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ AND AD. HOWEVER, HIS MONEY,
(PRIMARILY HIS SECOND WIFE'S), SOPHISTICATION, GRASP OF
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND DISDAIN FOR WORKING WITHIN PARTY
HIERARCHY AND DISCIPLINE RUN COUNTER TO ALL THAT ROMULO
BETANCOURT, AD PRESIDENTIAL DANDIDATE LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ
AND THE OTHER AD PARTY REGULARS ADMIRE. IN 1977, PRIOR TO THE
PINERUA NOMINATION IN AUGUST, ARRIA MADE SPEECHES
WHICH MANY CONSIDERED TO BE THE BEGINNING OF AN INDEPENDENT
CAMPAIGN FOR THE PRESIDENCY (REF F). BUT PRESIDENT PEREZ
PUT GREAT PRESSURE ON HIM TO WAIT UNTIL 1983 WHEN,
TOGETHER, THEY COULD TAKE OVER THE AD PARTY AFTER BETANCOURT
WAS NO LONGER POLITICALLY ACTIVE. ARRIA CONTINUED TO TOY
WITH THE IDEA UNTIL NOVEMBER AND THEN SEEMED TO ACCEPT
PEREZ' OFFER OF PATIENCE IN EXCHANGE FOR FUTURE REWARD.
EVEN AS LATE AS FOUR WEEKS AGO, PRESS ACCOUNTS STATED THAT
ARRIA HAD DEVINITELY DECIDED NOT TO RUN AN INDEPENDENT RACE.

2. AMBITION AND IMPATIENCE

THREE WEEKS AGO TWO WELL-INFORMED COLUMNISTS SPECULATED
THAT ARRIA WOULD RUN. ARRIA CONFIRMED AS MUCH TO THE
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PAGE 03 CARACA 02960 01 OF 02 301602Z

AMBASSADOR (REF B). ACCORDING TO VARIOUS SOURCES HIS
RATIONALE IS A) HE WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT; B) HE WILL
NEVER BE ACCEPTED BY THE AD PARTY (OR BY COPEI); C) HE
DOES NOT HAVE THE PERSONALITY TO BE A PARTY MAN; D) NEITHER
OF THE CANDIDATES FOR THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES (PINERUA
FOR AD AND HERRERA FOR COPEI) HAVE CAPTURED THE PUBLIC'S
ATTENTION; D) IF PINERUA BECOMES PRESIDENT, ARRIA'S
POLITICAL CAREER WILL BE FINISHED UNLESS HE BUILDS HIS
OWN BASE NOW; E) HIS POPULARITY IS NOW AT ITS ZENITH,
IN FIVE YEARS HE COULD BE ANOTHER HAS-BEEN; F) HE HAS
ACCESS TO FINANCES AND CONCEIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN AS A
MEDIA EXERCISE. SINCE HIS IS A MASTER OF THE MEDIA, HE
IS GOING TO GIVE IT A WHIRL.

3. COMMON CAUSE AND THE THIRD FORCE

ARRIA HAS DECIDED TO NAME HIS MOVEMENT "COMMON CAUSE"
THE SAME NAME HE GAVE TO HIS 1973 EFFORT ON BEHALF OF
PEREZ. THE NAME IS ONLY A SLOGAN AND HAS NOTHING IN
COMMON WITH THE U.S. ORGANIZATION. OUT OF AN ELECTORATE
OF APPROXIMATELY SIX MILLION, POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE
THAT ARRIA COULD GARNER 500-600,000 VOTES (MORE THAN HALF
OF THEM IN CARACAS METROPOLITAN AREA WHERE HE IS BEST

KNOWN). ARRIA TOLD THE AMBASSADOR HE HAS ONLY AN OUTSIDE CHANCE OF BEING ELECTED PRESIDENT, BUT HE IS COUNTING ON SPLITTING POWER THREE WAYS. THIS ASSUMES THAT NO ONE CANDIDATE WOULD RECEIVE MORE THAN 40 PERCENT OF THE VOTE AND NO SINGLE PARTY WOULD ACHIEVE A MAJORITY IN CONGRESS. HE COULD BE ELECTED TO THE SENATE (CANDIDATES CAN RUN SIMULTANEOUSLY FOR THE PRESIDENCY AND THE SENATE) AND A GAGGLE OF HIS FOLLOWERS WOULD BE ELECTED TO THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES. THUS, HE COULD BECOME THE POWER BROKER, EVEN IF THE NUMBER OF CONGRESSMEN HE CONTROLS ARE SUBSTANTIALLY LESS THAN THOSE CONTROLLED BY EITHER AD OR COPERI.

4. COUNTRY CLUB IMAGE AND CLAY FEET CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 CARACA 02960 01 OF 02 301602Z

EXTREMELY HANDSOME, ARRIA AND HIS WIFE LIVE IN SPLENDOR IN THE LUXURIOUS COUNTRY CLUB AREA OF CARACAS. COOL, SMOOTH, WITH HIS EVER-PRESENT SILVER-TOPPED CANE AS A SYMBOL (THE RESULT OF A CAR ACCIDENT) ARRIA EXUDES CONFIDENCE, INTELLIGENCE, AND THE GOOD LIFE. IN FACT, HE HAS OFTEN BEEN CALLED A VENEZUELAN JFK BECAUSE OF HIS "BEAUTIFUL PERSON" LIFE STYLE. HE SEEKS TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF YOUTH AND VITALITY, OF BEING "WITH IT" AND A "DOER." A PLASTIC MAN, HE DOES NOT STAND FOR ANYTHING PARTICULARLY, EXCEPT POSSIBLY CONSUMERISM. HIS SPEECHES, WHILE IN THE PEREZ GOVERNMENT, TENDED TO BE GENERAL AND PLATITUDINOUS. PEOPLE WHO KNOW HIM WELL AND LIKE HIM BELIEVE THAT HE IS A CAPABLE ADMINISTRATOR AND ESSENTIALLY A CONSERVATIVE IN POLITICAL OUTLOOK. NOT AN INTELLECTUAL, HE HAS THE POLITICIAN'S INSTINCTIVE GRASP OF WHAT CAPTURES THE IMAGINATION. ARRIA, HOWEVER, IS WIDELY BELIEVED TO BE CORRUPT. EVEN HIS FRIENDS FIND IT HARD TO DEFEND HIM FROM THIS CHARGE. ARRIA, IT IS PERSISTENTLY ALLEGED, HAS USED HIS PUBLIC POSITIONS (ESPECIALLY AS GOVERNOR OF CARACAS, WHEN HE HANDLED THE MULTIMILLION RESOURCES AND CONTRACTS OF THE CENTRO SIMON BOLIVAR) TO ENRICH HIMSELF. BOTH THE AD AND COPEI PARTIES CLAIM TO HAVE FILES DETAILING HIS CORRUPTION. BOTH PARTIES HAVE FLIRTED WITH ARRIA AND NOW SPURN HIM. THEY WILL BOTH USE CORRUPTION AGAINST HIM LIKE GUT-FIGHTERS, MERCILESSLY. AND YET, DESPITE THE CLAY FEET, HE HAS POWERFUL VOTE-DRAWING POWER.

5. ARRIA'S RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ AS REPORTED IN REFS A AND B, PRESIDENT PEREZ ACCEPTED

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 CARACA 02960 02 OF 02 062247Z
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1755

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CARACAS 2960

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 5 THRU 8)

5. ARRIA'S RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ
AS REPORTED IN REFS A AND B, PRESIDENT PEREZ ACCEPTED
ARRIA'S RESIGNATION FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. CHIEF
AMONG THESE WERE BITTER OPPOSITION BY FORMER PRESIDENT
BETANCOURT, GROWING AND PERSISTENT PRESSURE FROM AD
PARTY REGULARS, ARRIA'S LESS THAN SPECTACULAR PERFORMANCE
AS INFORMATION MINISTER (HIS PROPOSAL THAT ALL VENEZUELAN
RADIO STATIONS BROADCAST TWO GOVERNMENT NEWS STORIES
A DAY PROVED TO BE A FAILURE AND HE WAS SO WIDELY
BELIEVED TO BE RESONSIBLE FOR HARRASSING RESUMEN
EDITOR OLAVARRIA THAT HE BECAME AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE
GOV), AND EVEN CONFLICT WITHIN THE CABINET AS TO WHO
WOULD BE THE PRIME MINISTER SHAPERS OF PRESIDENT
CARTER'S VISIT. A CRUCIAL FACTOR MAY HAVE BEEN
THE FACT THAT ARRIA HAD BEEN CONTACTING INFLUENTIAL
PERSONS IN THE INTERIOR, SOUNDING OUT THEIR SUPPORT FOR
HIS INDEPENDENT CANDIDACY. THE AD PARTY REGULARS WERE
FURIOUS AND APPARENTLY LOST NO TIME IN BRINGING THIS
DISLOYAL ACT TO PRESIDENT PEREZ' ATTENTION WHO WAS
GENUINELY ANNOYED WITH ARRIA ABOUT THIS. ARRIA APPARENTLY
OVER-ESTIMATED PRESIDENT PEREZ' NEED OF HIM AND THE
PRESIDENT, AS A POLITICAL REALIST, WAS OBLIGED TO ACCEPT
HIS RESIGNATION. ARRIA HAS TOLD SEVERAL PEOPLE THAT
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PAGE 02 CARACA 02960 02 OF 02 062247Z

HE STILL CONSIDERS HIMSELF A FRIEND OF PEREZ AND THAT,
IF HE CAN BUILD AN INDEPENDENT BASE, HE CAN REJOIN
PRESIDENT PEREZ AT SOME FUTURE DATE. INCREDIBLE AS THIS
MAY SEEM, THIS IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE. FOR THE MOMENT,

HOWEVER, THERE IS BOUND TO BE SOME TENSION BETWEEN THE TWO. ARRIA IS PROBABLY SURPRISED BY PEREZ' ACTION AND PEREZ, WHO PRIZES PERSONAL LOYALTY AND WHO HAS SPENT HIS WHOLE LIFE RISING STEP BY STEP WITHIN THE AD PARTY, COULD HARDLY BE EXPECTED TO SYMPATHIZE WITH ARRIA'S IMPATIENCE. PEREZ WILL BE HURT BY CHARGES WITHIN AD THAT HE HELPED CREATE ARRIA AS A POLITICAL FORCE. APPARENTLY THERE IS NOW CONSIDERABLE TENSION BETWEEN THE PARTY AND PEREZ OVER THIS ISSUE. IF HERRERA WERE TO MAKE A GOOD SHOWING, THE AD PARTY REGULARS' PERCEPTION WOULD BE THAT ARRIA COST THEIR CANDIDATE PINERUA SOME VOTES, AND PEREZ WILL COME UNDER INCREASING CRITICISM. IN THIS CONNECTION, THERE IS A RUMOR CURRENT IN CARACAS THAT, CLOSE TO THE END OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN PERIOD, PRESIDENT PEREZ WILL THROW HIS SUPPORT TO ARRIA. THIS, IN THE EMBASSY'S OPINION, IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY BECAUSE IT IMPLIES THAT PEREZ WOULD, IN EFFECT, BREAK DEFINITELY WITH AD. THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT CAP, DESPITE HIS DIFFERENCES WITH THE AD PARTY REGULARS, WOULD CONSIDER SUCH A MOMENTOUS MOVE. EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT HIM SUGGESTS HE IS LOYAL TO THE PARTY, ALTHOUGH HE HAS BEEN RESTLESS AS PRESIDENT WITH THE PARTY'S CONTINUAL EFFORTS TO TELL HIM WHAT TO DO. PEREZ SURPRISED THE PARTY THAT NURTURED HIM WHEN HE ACHIEVED THE PRESIDENCY BY TRYING TO BE HIS OWN MAN AND SHAKE HIMSELF FREE OF AT LEAST SOME MEASURE OF PARTY CONTROL. THE FACT THAT HE SUCCEEDED TO SOME EXTENT HAS CAUSED FRICTION BETWEEN HIM AND THE PARTY APPARATUS AND BETWEEN HIM AND BETANCOURT. AND YET THE PARTY HAS EXACTED ITS DISCIPLINE AND PEREZ HAS ULTIMATELY

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PAGE 03 CARACA 02960 02 OF 02 062247Z

ACCEPTED IT. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE WAY IN WHICH PEREZ EXPRESSED HIS INDEPENDENCE WAS BY NAMING NON-PARTY MEMBERS TO HIS CABINET. THE PARTY OPPOSED THIS AND TO A GREATER OR LESSER EXTENT CONTRIBUTED TO HIS REPLACING SUCH FIGURES AS GUMERSINOD RODRIQUEZ, ESCOBAR SALOM AND NOW ARRIA. THE PARTY NOW HAS ITS SIGHTS ON ANOTHER PEREZ FAVORITE, CARMELO LAURIA, MINISTER OF THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY, PEREZ' CHIEF OF STAFF AND ECONOMIC CZAR. THERE IS NO REASON TO DOUBT THAT PEREZ' GAME PLAN IS WHAT HE TOLD ARRIA SOME MONTHS AGO-NAMELY, TO TAKE OVER AD. WHEN PEREZ LEAVES POWER HE WILL BECOME A SENATOR FOR LIFE. HE WILL PROBABLY LIE LOW FOR ABOUT THREE YEARS, PERHAPS TRAVELING TO KEEP ALIVE THE CONTACTS HE MADE AS PRESIDENT. AS THE END OF THAT PERIOD, PEREZ WOULD SEEK TO INCREASE HIS CONTROL OVER THE PARTY, PERHAPS CHOOSING WHO IN AD WILL RUN AGAINST EX-PRESIDENT CALDERA IN 1983. ULTIMATELY, PEREZ HAS HIS EYE ON THE PRESIDENCY IN 1989. RECENT VENEZUELAN POLITICAL HISTORY SUGGESTS CLEARLY THAT ONLY THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES CAN PUT A MAN IN THE PRESIDENCY.

PEREZ WOULD THROW AWAY HIS FUTURE BY SUPPORTING ARRIA.
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